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12 March 2004

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Russia: Compensation available for ship workers (marine engineers) who are disabled as a result of working on ships that dispose of nuclear or radio-active wastes
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Radioactive wastes can be divided into two categories: liquid radioactive waste (LRW) which is contaminated water used to cool submarine nuclear reactors, and solid radioactive waste (SRW), which includes spent fuel and the sludge that results from the LRW decontamination process (NPR 2001, 134). Historically, the Soviet Navy and Russian Navy have dumped radioactive waste into the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, particularly into the Sea of Japan and the Baltic Sea (NTI Apr. 2001). Alternatively, wastes would be stored in sites located on land in various locations and on storage ships, which serviced the Northern and Pacific fleets (ibid.).

In Russia's north, the Murmansk Shipping Company (MSC) dumped LRW in the Arctic and into the Barents Sea until 1984 (ibid.). The Nuclear Threat Institute (NTI) also reported that the MSC and the Soviet Northern Fleet dumped SRW into the Arctic Ocean's Kara Sea until 1986 (ibid.). In the Far East, the Russian Navy dumped SRW and LRW in the Sea of Japan, the Sea of Okhotsk and the North Pacific Ocean until 1993 (ibid.; NPR 2001, 135). The NTI reported in 2001 that the last recorded incident of radioactive waste dumping at sea by the Russian Navy took place in the Sea of Japan in 1993 (Apr. 2001). The Research Directorate was unable to find reports of radioactive waste dumping by the Russian government, its navy or by private industry after 1993, among the sources consulted.

Existing Waste Processing Facilities

The Russian government maintains several offshore facilities for storage, processing and disposal of nuclear waste in the Russian North and Far East (NPR 2001, 135; NTI Apr. 2001). Reports refer to SRW and LRW storage and disposal operations at SNP Nerpa in Murmansk Oblast, Zvezdochka in Severodvinsk, Zevzda Far Eastern Shipyard in Primorskiy Kray (*Yadernyy Kontrol* 23 Nov. 2000), Vladivostok and the Shkotovo Peninsula (NTI Apr. 2001). The Zvezda Far Eastern Shipyard in Primorskiy Kray hosts two vessels designed to process LRW (NTI Apr. 2001): a *Pinega*-class submarine support ship and the *Landysh* ("Lily of the Valley"), a facility located on a barge (NPR 2001, 135, 143; NTI Apr. 2001; ibid. 15 Aug. 2002). The *Pinega* is mainly used for storage and only infrequently for processing of LRW (NPR 2001, 143) while the *Landysh* began processing waste in October 2000 (ibid.; NTI 15 Aug. 2002; ibid. Apr. 2001).

Employees and Compensation for Illness

References to employees working in the field of marine radioactive disposal are limited among the sources consulted. Russian Navy staffed a number of the vessels that process, store and dispose of radioactive materials (NTI Apr. 2001; NPR 2001, 137; *Yadernyy Kontrol* 23 Nov. 2000). Thirty-eight civilian employees staff the *Lepse* (Bellona 4 Jan. 2001), a LRW and SRW storage vessel under the ownership of MSC, which has been a private enterprise since 1998 (NTI 28 Jan. 2004). According to NTI, the Lepse is one of five ships owned by MSC and responsible for the storage and processing of LRW and SRW (ibid.). In the Russian Far East, a crew of 12 specially trained civilian technicians work at the *Landysh* facility (NPR 2001, 143).

Reports concerning employee's working conditions suggest there may some radiation risks presented by the occupational environment (Bellona 4 Jan. 2001; ibid. 15 Oct. 2002). According to a 2002 report by the Norwegian environmental foundation, Bellona, the vessels used for storage in Russia's Far East became highly irradiated and those serving aboard suffered exposure to elevated levels of radiation (ibid.). Similar concerns for the 38 employees working on the waste storage ship *Lepse* resulted in their being moved into a housing complex so as to limit their occupational exposure to elevated levels of radiation on board the ship (ibid. 4 Jan. 2001). According to Bellona, Lepse crewmembers were exposed to radiation levels above the level officially allowed under Russian legislation (ibid.).

The Research Directorate was unable to find reports regarding compensation available to workers who contracted an illness from their employment on radioactive waste disposal vessels, among the sources consulted. A December 2003 interview with the Deputy Minister of Atomic Energy reported that Russia has significant problems financing its disposal tasks (*Yadernyy Kontrol* 1 Dec. 2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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